

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

Covenant of the League of Nations

Paris Peace Conference, April 28, 1919

PREAMBLE

In order to promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security, by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war, by the prescription of open, just and honorable relations between nations, by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as to actual rule of conduct among Governments, and by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another, the high contracting parties agree to this covenant of the League of Nations.

ARTICLE I

The original members of the League of Nations shall be those of the signatories which are named in the annex to this covenant and also such of those other states named in the annex as shall accede without reservation to this covenant. Such accessions shall be effected by a declaration deposited with the Secretariat within two months of the coming into force of the covenant. Notice thereof shall be sent to all other members of the league.

Any fully self-governing state, dominion or colony not named in the annex may become a member of the league if its admission is agreed to by two-thirds of the assembly, provided that it shall give effective guarantees of its sincere intention to observe its international obligations and shall accept such regulations as may be prescribed by the league in regard to its military and naval forces and armaments.

Any member of the league may, after two years' notice of its intention so to do, withdraw from the league, provided that all its international obligations and all its obligations under this covenant shall have been fulfilled at the time of its withdrawal.

ARTICLE II

The action of the league under this covenant shall be effected through the instrumentality of an Assembly and of a Council, with a permanent Secretariat.

ARTICLE III

The Assembly shall consist of representatives of the members of the league.

The Assembly shall meet at stated intervals, and from time to time as occasion may require, at the seat of the league, or at such other place as may be decided upon.

The Assembly may deal at its meetings with any matter within the sphere of action of the league or affecting the peace of the world.

At meetings of the Assembly each member of the league shall have one vote, and may have not more than three representatives.

ARTICLE IV

The Council shall consist of representatives of the United States of America, of the British Empire, of France, of Italy, and of Japan, together with representatives of four other members of the league. These four members of the league shall be selected by the Assembly from time to time in its discretion. Until the appointment of the representatives of the four members of the league first selected by the Assembly, representatives of Belgium, Brazil, Greece and Spain shall be members of the Council.

With the approval of the majority of the Assembly, the Council may name additional members of the league, whose representatives shall always be members of the Council ; the Council with like approval may increase the number of members of the league to be selected by the Assembly for representation on the Council.

The Council shall meet from time to time as occasion may require, and at least once a year, at the seat of the league, or at such other place as may be decided upon.

The Council may deal at its meetings with any matter within the sphere of action of the league or affecting the peace of the world.

Any member of the league not represented on the Council shall be invited to send a representative to sit as a member at any meeting of the Council during the consideration of matters specially affecting the interests of that member of the league.

At meetings of the Council, each member of the league represented on the Council shall have one vote, and may have not more than one representative.

ARTICLE V

Except where otherwise expressly provided in this covenant, or by the terms of this treaty, decisions at any meeting of the Assembly or of the Council shall require the agreement of all the members of the league represented at the meeting.

All matters of procedure at meetings of the Assembly or the Council, the appointment of committees to investigate particular matters, shall be regulated by the Assembly or by the Council and may be decided by a majority of the members of the league represented at the meeting.

The first meeting of the Assembly and the first meeting of the Council shall be summoned by the President of the United States of America.

ARTICLE VI

The permanent Secretariat shall be established at the seat of the league. The Secretariat shall comprise a Secretary General and such secretaries and staff as may be required.

The first Secretary General shall be the person named in the annex; thereafter the Secretary General shall be appointed by the Council with the approval of the majority of the Assembly.

The secretaries and the staff of the Secretariat shall be appointed by the Secretary General with the approval of the Council.

The Secretary General shall act in that capacity at all meetings of the Assembly and of the Council.

The expenses of the Secretariat shall be borne by the members of the league in accordance with the apportionment of the expenses of the International Bureau of the Universal Postal Union.

ARTICLE VII

The seat of the league is established at Geneva.

The Council may at any time decide that the seat of the league shall be established elsewhere.

All positions under or in connection with the league, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women.

Representatives of the members of the league and officials of the league when engaged on the business of the league shall enjoy diplomatic privileges and immunities

The buildings and other property occupied by the league or its officers or by representatives attending its meetings shall be inviolable.

ARTICLE VIII

The members of the league recognize that the maintenance of a peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.

The Council, taking account of the geographical situation and circumstances of each state, shall formulate plans for such reduction for the consideration and action of the several Governments.

Such plans shall be subject to reconsideration and revision at least every ten years.

After these plans shall have been adopted by the several Governments, limits of armaments therein fixed shall not be exceeded without the concurrence of the Council.

The members of the league agree that the manufacture by private enterprise of munitions and implements of war is open to grave objections. The Council shall advise how the evil effects attendant upon such manufacture can be prevented, due regard being had to the necessities of those members of the league which are not able to manufacture the munitions and implements of war necessary for their safety.

The members of the league undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military and naval programmes and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to warlike purposes.

ARTICLE IX

A permanent commission shall be constituted to advise the Council on the execution of the provisions of Articles I and VIII and on military and naval questions generally.

ARTICLE X

The members of the league undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the league. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression, the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.

ARTICLE XI

Any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the members of the league or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole league, and the league shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations. In case any such emergency should arise, the Secretary General shall, on the request of any member of the league, forthwith summon a meeting of the Council.

It is also declared to be the fundamental right of each member of the league to bring to the attention of the Assembly or of the Council any circumstance whatever affecting international relations which threatens to disturb either the peace or the good understanding between nations upon which peace depends.

ARTICLE XII

The members of the league agree that if there should arise between them any dispute likely to lead to a rupture, they will submit the matter either to arbitration or to inquiry by the Council, and they agree in no case to resort to war until three months after the award by the arbitrator or the report by the Council.

In any case under this article the award of the *arbitratores* shall be made within a reasonable time, and the report of the Council shall be made within six months after the submission of the dispute.

ARTICLE XIII

The members of the league agree that whenever any dispute shall arise between them which they recognize to be suitable for submission to arbitration and which cannot be satisfactorily settled by diplomacy, they will submit the whole subject matter to arbitration. Disputes as to the interpretation of a treaty, as to any question of international law, as to the existence of any fact which if established would constitute a breach of any international obligation, or as to the extent and nature of the reparation to be made for any such breach, are declared to be among those which are generally suitable for submission to arbitration. For the consideration of any such dispute the court of arbitration to which the case is referred shall be the court agreed on by the parties to the dispute or stipulated in any convention existing between them.

The members of the league agree that they will carry out in full good faith any award that may be rendered and that they will not resort to war against a member of the league which complies therewith. In the event of any failure to carry out such an award, the Council shall propose what steps should be taken to give effect thereto.

ARTICLE XIV

The Council shall formulate and submit to the members of the league for adoption plans for the establishment of a permanent Court of International Justice. The court shall be competent to hear and determine any dispute of an international character which the parties thereto submit to it. The court may also give an advisory opinion upon any dispute or question referred to it by the Council or by the Assembly.

ARTICLE XV

If there should arise between members of the league any dispute likely to lead to a rupture, which is not submitted to arbitration as above, the members of the league agree that they will submit the matter to the Council. Any party to the dispute may effect such submission by giving notice of the existence of the dispute to the Secretary General, who will make all necessary arrangements for a full investigation and consideration thereof. For this purpose the parties to the dispute will communicate to the Secretary General, as promptly as possible, statements of their case, all the relevant facts and papers ; and the Council may forthwith direct the publication thereof.

The Council shall endeavor to effect a settlement of any dispute, and if such efforts are successful, a statement shall be made public giving such facts and explanations regarding the dispute and terms of settlement thereof as the Council may deem appropriate.

If the dispute is not thus settled, the Council either unanimously or by a majority vote shall make and publish a report containing a statement of the facts of the dispute and the recommendations which are deemed just and proper in regard thereto.

Any member of the league represented on the Council may make public a statement of the facts of the dispute and of its conclusions regarding the same.

If a report by the Council is unanimously agreed to by the members thereof, other than the representatives of one or more of the parties to the dispute, the members of the league agree that they will not go to war with any party to the dispute which complies with the recommendations of the report.

If the Council fails to reach a report which is unanimously agreed to by the members thereof, other than the representatives of one or more of the parties to the dispute, the members of the league reserve to themselves the right to take such action as they shall consider necessary for the maintenance of right and justice.

If the dispute between the parties is claimed by one of them, and is found by the Council to arise out of a matter which by international law is solely within the domestic jurisdiction of that party, the Council shall so report, and shall make no recommendation as to its settlement.

The Council may in any case under this article refer the dispute to the Assembly.

The dispute shall be so referred at the request of either party of the dispute, provided that such request be made within fourteen days after the submission of the dispute to the Council.

In any case referred to the Assembly all the provisions of this article and of Article XII relating to the action and powers of the Council shall apply to the action and powers of the Assembly, provided that a report made by the Assembly, if concurred in by the representatives of those members of the league represented on the Council and of a majority of the other members of the league, exclusive in each case of the representatives of the parties to the dispute, shall have the same force as a report by the Council concurred in by all the members thereof other than the representatives of one or more of the parties to the dispute.

ARTICLE XVI

Should any member of the league resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Article XII, XIII or XV, it shall *ipso facto* be deemed to have committed an act of war against all the other members of the league, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking state and the prevention of all financial, commercial, or personal intercourse between the nationals of the covenant-breaking state and the nationals of any other state, whether a member of the league or not.

It shall be the duty of the Council in such case to recommend to the several Governments concerned what effective military or naval forces the members of the league shall severally contribute to the armaments of forces to be used to protect the covenants of the league.

The members of the league agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this article, in order to minimize the loss and inconvenience resulting from the above measures, and that they will mutually support one another in resisting any special measures aimed at one of their number by the covenant-breaking state, and that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the members of the league which are cooperating to protect the covenants of the league.

Any member of the league which has violated any covenant of the league may be declared to be no longer a member of the league by a vote of the Council concurred in by the representatives of all the other members of the league represented thereon

ARTICLE XVII

In the event of a dispute between a member of the league and a state which is not a member of the league, or between states not members of the league, the state or states not members of the league shall be invited to accept the obligations of membership in the league for the purposes of such dispute, upon such conditions as the Council may deem just. If such invitation is accepted, the provisions of Articles XII to XVI inclusive shall be applied with such modifications as may be deemed necessary by the Council.

Upon such invitation being given, the Council shall immediately institute an inquiry into the circumstances of the dispute and recommend such action as may seem best and most effectual in the circumstances.

If a state so invited shall refuse to accept the obligations of membership in the league for the purposes of such dispute, and shall resort to war against a member of the league, the provisions of Article XVI shall be applicable as against the state taking such action.

If both parties to the dispute, when so invited, refuse to accept the obligations of membership in the league for the purposes of such dispute, the Council may take such measures and make such recommendations as will prevent hostilities and will result in the settlement of the dispute.

ARTICLE XVIII

Every convention or international engagement entered into henceforward by any member of the league shall be forthwith registered with the Secretariat and shall as soon as possible be published by it. No such treaty or international engagement shall be binding until so registered.

ARTICLE XIX

The Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by members of the league of treaties which have become inapplicable, and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world.

ARTICLE XX

The members of the league severally agree that this covenant is accepted as abrogating all obligations or understandings *inter se* which are inconsistent with the terms thereof, and solemnly undertake that they will not hereafter enter into any engagements inconsistent with the terms thereof.

In case members of the league shall, before becoming a member of the league, have undertaken any obligations inconsistent with the terms of this covenant, it shall be the duty of such member to take immediate steps to procure its release from such obligations.

ARTICLE XXI

Nothing in this covenant shall be deemed to affect the validity of international engagements such as treaties of arbitration or regional understandings like the Monroe Doctrine for securing the maintenance of peace.

ARTICLE XXII

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the states which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this covenant.

The best method of giving practicable effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples be intrusted to advanced nations who, by reasons of their resources, their experience or their geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as mandataries on behalf of the league.

The character of the mandate must differ according to the stage of the development of the people, the geographical situation of the territory, its economic condition and other similar circumstances.

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized, subject to the

rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatary until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the mandatary.

Other peoples, especially those of Central Africa, are at such a stage that the mandatary must be responsible for the administration of the territory under conditions which will guarantee freedom of conscience or religion subject only to the maintenance of public order and morals, the prohibition of abuses, such as the slave trade, the arms traffic and the liquor traffic and the prevention of the establishment of fortifications or military and naval bases and of military training of the natives for other than police purposes and the defense of territory and will also secure equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other members of the league.

There are territories, such as Southwest Africa and certain of the South Pacific Islands, which, owing to the sparseness of their population or their small size or their remoteness from the centres of civilization or their geographical contiguity to the territory of the mandatary and other circumstances, can be best administered under the laws of the mandatary as integral portions of its territory, subject to the safeguards above mentioned in the interests of the indigenous population. In every case of mandate, the mandatary shall render to the Council an annual report in reference to the territory committed to its charge.

The degree of authority, control or administration to be exercised by the mandatary shall, if not previously agreed upon by the members of the league, be explicitly defined in each case by the Council.

A permanent commission shall be constituted to receive and examine the annual reports of the mandataries and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates.

ARTICLE XXIII

Subject to and in accordance with the provisions of international conventions existing or hereafter to be agreed upon, the members of the league (a) will endeavor to secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labor for men, women and children both in their own countries and in all countries to which their commercial and industrial relations extend, and for that purpose will establish and maintain the necessary international organizations; (b) under-take to secure just treatment of the native inhabitants of territories under their control; (c) will intrust the league with the general supervision over the execution of agreements with regard to the traffic in women and children, and the traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs; (d) will intrust the league with the general supervision of the trade in arms and ammunition with

the countries in which the control of this traffic is necessary in the common interest ; (e) will make provision to secure and maintain freedom of communication and of transit and equitable treatment for the commerce of all members of the league. In this connection the special necessities of the regions devastated during the war of 1914-1918 shall be in mind ; (f) will endeavor to take steps in matters of international concern for the prevention and control of disease.

ARTICLE XXIV

There shall be placed under the direction of the league all international bureaus already established by general treaties if the parties to such treaties consent. All such international bureaus and all commissions for the regulation of matters of international interest hereafter constituted shall be placed under the direction of the league.

In all matters of international interest which are regulated by general conventions but which are not placed under the control of international bureaus or commissions, the Secretariat of the league shall, subject to the consent of the Council and if desired by the parties, collect and distribute all relevant information, and shall render any other assistance which may be necessary or desirable.

The Council may include as part of the expenses of the Secretariat the expenses of any bureau or commission which is placed under the direction of the league.

ARTICLE XXV

The members of the league agree to encourage and promote the establishment and cooperation of duly authorized voluntary national Red Cross organizations having as purposes improvement

of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world.

ARTICLE XXVI

Amendments to this covenant will take effect when ratified by the members of the league whose representatives compose the Council and by a majority of the members of the league whose representatives compose the Assembly.

No such amendment shall bind any member of the League which signifies its dissent therefrom, but in that case it shall cease to be a member of the League.

ANNEX TO THE COVENANT

One. Original members of the League of Nations.

Signatories of the Treaty of Peace.

United States of America, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, British Empire, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, India, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Ecuador, France, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Hedjaz, Honduras, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Serbia, Siam, Uruguay.

States invited to accede to the covenant.

Argentine Republic, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Paraguay, Persia, Salvador, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Venezuela.

Two. First Secretary General of the League of Nations. ■

Source

The Internet Modern History Source Book, compiled by Paul Halsall at Fordham University

<http://www.archive.org/details/pariscovenantfor00leagiala>